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FIFTY POEMS

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By JOHN FREEMAN

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FIFTY POEMS

BY

JOHN FREEMAN

LONDON
SELWYN & BLOUNT
1916

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THE PALL MALL GAZETTE,

THE TRAMP.

The Author's acknowledgments are due to the respective Editors, for permission to reprint.

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Fifty Poems

I

THANKSGIVING

To whom be thanks ? To them whose sorrow I
Perforce did share, though their bright fortitude
I could not share :
To them chief thanks, whose half-suppress'd low sigh
Taught me the bitterness of solitude
I could not bear.

And unto them be thanks, those poor who showed
How cheerfully and plaintless men may live ;
For whom to die
Were but to lose an unsustainable load,
Since barren life scarce even bread could give
Them to live by.

And unto you, poor lost ones evil-starr'd,
Who taught me all your evil, and taught then
Its impotence ;
To you be thanks, by weak regret unmarr'd ;
For how should I ever o'erprize again
Your lures of sense ?

But you, O poets of the living word,
And you, magicians of rich melodies,
How should I pay

Thanks for the music heard, and that unheard
Save in my heart ? for look, you touch the keys
And on me play.

Even as you will. . . . Enough ! I will praise Life
For all things living, glad, sad, foul and fair.
Since I have trod
The brittle years, and all with splendour rife,
I will praise life's abundance—for who dare
Give praise to God ?

II

PROMISE

THE cold moon from the hilltop stares
  Over the leafless shaws and dark ;
Fronting the moon the hillside bares
    Her bosom stark.

Of all things else only cold age
  Might show thus desolate and chill.
So looks the last month's pilgrimage,
    So the last hill.

Down the moon-ghostened road there walks,
  Beneath dark shadow and white shine,
A girl who to her own heart talks
    Of things so fine,

So sure and fine, she breaks with song
  The stillness sealing everything :
She nurses in her bosom the long
    Promise of Spring.

III

EVENING BEAUTY: BLACKFRIARS

Nought is but beauty weareth, near and far,
Under the pale, blue sky and lonely star.
This is that quick hour when the city turns
Her troubled harsh distortion and blind care
Into brief loveliness seen everywhere,
While in the fuming west the low sun smouldering burns.

Not brick nor marble the rich beauty owns,
Not this is held in starward-pointing stones.
Sun, wind and smoke the threefold magic stir,
Kissing each favourless poor ruin with kiss
Like that when lovers lovers lure to bliss,
And earth than heaven awhile is heavenlier.

Tall shafts that show the sky how far away!
The thousand-window'd house gilded with day
That fades to night; the arches low, the streamer
Everywhere of the ruddy'd smoke. . . . Is aught
Of loveliness so rich e'er sold and bought?
Look visions fairer in the eyes of any dreamer?

Needs must so rare a beauty be so brief!
Night comes, of this delight the subtle thief.
Thou canst not, Night, this same rich thievery keep;
Seize it and look! 'tis gone, ere seized is gone—
Only in our warm bosoms lingering on,
A nest of precious dreams when droop our eyes in sleep.

So in her darkening loveliness is she seen
Like an autumnal passion-haunted queen,
Who hears, " A captain-king is nigh the gate "—
" 'Tis Antony, Antony ! " Then hastens she,
Beauty to beauty adding yet, till—see,
A queen within the queen perilous with love and fate !

IV

"MY TRUE LOVE HATH MY HEART"

SHE is more bright than are those flowers
April hands on to May.
Sweeter with her are spent my hours,
Than else the day.

Hers is the beauty women own
By love transfigurèd;
Beauty of swallows early flown,
Or Spring half fled.

Yea, 'tis a thing almost for tears,
Being for joy too great,
Yet subject not to fret of years,
Nor to swift Fate.

Eyes mild as those the peaceful herds
Turn towards the lessening sun:
She hath the voice of gathering birds
When the day's done.

Thou canst not, subtle Sorrow, reach
Thy finger to her breast;
Nor thou, Delight, canst Envy teach
To break her rest.

To love her how could I but choose,
Though nought to Love will bind her. . . .
No matter, for I cannot lose,
Since I ne'er find her.

V

THE WEAVER OF MAGIC

WEAVE cunningly the web
Of Twilight, O thou subtle-fingered Eve!
And at the slow day's ebb
With small blue stars the purple curtain weave.
If any wind there be,
Bid it but breathe lightly as woodland violets o'er the sea;
If any moon, be it no more than a white fluttering feather.
Call the last birds together.

O Eve, and let no wisp
Of day's distraction thine enchantment mar;
Thy soft spell lisp
And lure the sweetness down of each blue star.
Then let that low moan be
A while more easeful, trembling remote and strange, far oversea!
So shall the easeless heart of love rest then, or only sigh,
Hearing the swallows cry!

VI

SOLITUDE

By the broad mere he sitteth musingly
Watching the slow shadow of the hours
Wheel by, until the cold moon silver all,
Laving the water with her watery light.
He heareth the dusk-wingers' distant call,
And in the lucid stars reads the great peace of night.

Not of chill death their token, but of life!
What passion of calm purpose moveth there,
What secret pulse of immortality
Is beating! All the multitude of day,
The soul-bewildering beauty, quietly
Dieth away, and the soul's languors die away.

Then when no voice is, and is nothing seen
But of the narrow moon the chilly beam
And of the ancient stars their faithfulness;
Then sitting by the wan face of the mere
He feels the wind of strange wings numberless,
And spirits to his lowly spirit drawing near.

Empty of self awhile, and the sharp pang
Of foiled ambition and of common lust,
Empty of grief ev'n, and of mean regret,
Starlike in loneliness he watcheth pass
In one hour all the hours, and seeth the set
Of the chill moon and fade the stars that were as grass.

Or in the hour before the hour of dawn
Waking, he stands beside the stirless mere
Feeding upon the silence of the hour. . . .
O silent hour, than wine more vital far
Poured into veins of age, thine is the power
The faithful soul to enlarge, scattering small joys afar.

He watches, and is 'ware of other breath,
Of other eyes is 'ware and neighbourhood
Of presence great and strange. He feeleth then
A hand upon his own, a voice doth hear:
No voice, hand, eyes nor breath that's known to men;—
A Spirit to his lowly spirit draweth near.

And when out of the East a creeping light
Stirreth upon the waters, and the sense
Is strong of that pure tongueless ecstasy
Ere fading in the gathering glow of day;
A voice he hears quiet as memory,
That echoeth unendingly nor dieth away.

VII

STRIFE

The wind fought with the angry trees . . .
All morning in immense unease
They wrestled, and ruin strowed the ground,
And the north sky frowned.
The oak and aspen arms were held
Defiant, but the death was knelled
Of slender saplings, snappy boughs,
Twigs brittle as men's vows.
How moaned the trees the struggle through!
Anger almost to madness grew.
The aspen screamed, and came a roar
Of the great wind locked in anguish sore.
Desolate with defeat . . . and then,
Quiet fell again:
The trees slept quiet as great cows
That lie at noon 'neath broad green boughs.
How pure, how strange the calm; but hist! . . .
Was it the trees by the wind kist?
Or from afar, where the wind's hid,
A throb, a sob? . . .

VIII

UNDER THE LINDEN BRANCHES

Under the linden branches
They sit and whisper;
Hardly a quiver
Of leaves, hardly a lisp or
Sigh in the air.
Under the linden branches
They sit, and shiver
At the slow air's fingers
Drawn through the linden branches
Where the year's sweet lingers;
And sudden avalanches
Of memories, fears,
Shake from the linden branches
Upon them sitting
With hardly a sigh or a whisper
Or quiver of tears.

IX

THE NIGHT WATCH

BENEATH the trees with heedful step and slow
At night I go,
Fearful upon their whispering to break
Lest they awake
Out of those dreams of heavenly light that fill
Their branches still
With a soft murmur of memoried ecstasy.
There 'neath each tree
Nightlong a spirit watches, and I feel
His breath unseal
The fast-shut thoughts and longings of tired day,
That flutter away
Mothlike on luminous soft wings and frail
And moonlike pale.
There in the flowering chestnuts' bowering gloom
And limes' perfume
(Wandering wavelike through the moondrawn night
That heaves toward light),
There hang I my dark thoughts and deeper prayers;
And as the airs
Of star-kissed dawn come stirring and o'er-creep
The ford of sleep,
Thy shape, great Love, grows shadowy in the East,
Thine accents least
Of all those jarring voices of false morn:
And oh, forlorn
Thy hope, thy courage vanishing, thine eyes
Sad with surprise.

Oh, with the dawn I know, I know how vain
Is love that's fain
To beat and beat against Her obstinate door.
For as once more
It opes, she passes out nor heedeth me
(Nay, will not see);—
As when a man, rich and of high estate,
Sees at his gate
(Or will not see) a famishing poor wretch,
Whose longings fetch
A sob up from his pain-imprisoning breast,
Till sad despair his anger puts to rest.

X

THE NOBLE COMPANY

WHEN thou art safely entered, call for wine,
Nor wonder if at a brief word of thine
A thin ghost come, and between thee and day
Stand, like a bat's wing, frail and shadow-gray
And wavering. Speak to him boldly then:
Ask him for news of rare women and dead men
Once-famed; of ancient beauty and the bold
Bravery of sword-captains, sung of old
By poets everliving. Speak, and he,
As out of ghostly store lingeringly
Taking, shall of those great ones tell thee all
Thy heart may wish. Press him until he call
Even their shades to thine—those lovers which
On earth made love with lovelier tribute rich
Past mere love's self. Call for Catullus, and
Catullus verily by thee will stand,
Ghost by ghost, lover lover questioning,
New passion perished passion answering.
For Antony call, and Antony shall stir
The dark, nodding a challenge proudlier
Than men unloving. Or thou for Helen plead,
And ev'n shall Helen answer thee and lead
Thine eyes astray, thine heart astray. Or speak
Hector's great name, and Hector then shall seek
Thee with calm look.
Yes wondrously shall each
Answer in their high manner of old speech,
Thrilling thee as the wind a ship's bent mast.

But if thou reverently fear to cast
Thy shadow athwart theirs, then mix with those
That throng the meads where that dark river flows,
The obscure, nameless, noteless ghosts that keep
Such busyness as long vexes mortal sleep ;
And thou shalt hear all, all that happened long
And long ago : of the singers whose rich song
Reverberates ever, ever. Dante shall grow
Less stern, less bitter for thee ; yes, thou'lt know
Caesar's great brow ; and learn that, lonely yet,
Miltonic pride Milton's dark ghost doth fret.
. . . And maybe (for such grace hath been for shades),
Quaffing that thin wine when the faint day fades,
One with broad forehead, sweet lips, eyes that still
With old love and wild laughter wake and fill :
One such (there's none but one) will drink with thee,
And following him that excellent company
At heel—Falstaff and Romeo and Rosalind
And Bottom, and the rest.

XI

THE DARKSOME NIGHTINGALE

Why dost thou, darksome Nightingale,
Sing so distractingly—and here ?
Dawn's preludings prick my ear,
Faint light is creeping up the vale ;
While on these dead thy rarer
Song yet falls, dark night-farer.

Were it not better thou shouldst sing
Where the drenched lilac droops her plume,
Spreading frail banners of perfume ?
Or where the easeless pines enring
The river-lullèd village
Whose lads the lilac pillage ?

Oh, if aught songful these hid bones
Might reach, as doth the subtle rain,
Surely the dead had risen again
And listened, white by the white stones ;
Back to rich life song-charmed,
By ghostly joys alarmed.

This may not be. And yet, oh still
Pour like night dew thy richer speech
Some late-lost youth perchance to reach,
Or love-robbed girl ; and stir and fill
Their passionless cold bosoms
Under red wallflower blossoms !

XII

FOREBODING

O LINGER late, poor yellow lisping leaves!
As yet the eves
Are golden and the simple moon looks through
The clouds and you.
O linger yet although the night be blind,
And in the wind
You wake and lisp and shiver at the stir
And sigh of her
Whose rimy fingers chill you each and all:
And so you fall
As dead as hopes or dreams or whispered vows. . . .
O *then* the boughs
That bore your busy multitude shall feel
The cold light steal
Between them, and the timorous child shall start,
Hearing his heart
Drubbing affrighted at the frail gates, for lo,
The ghostly glow
Of the wild moon, caught in the barren arms
Of leafless branches loud with night's alarms!

XIII

FROM PICCADILLY IN AUGUST

Now the trees rest: the moon hath taught them sleep.
Like drowsy wings of bats are all their leaves,
Clinging together. Girls at ease who fold
Fair hands upon white necks and thro' dusk fields
Walk all content,—of them the trees have taken
Their way of evening rest; the yellow moon
With her pale gold hath lit their dreams that lisp
On the wind's murmurous lips.
And low beyond
Burn those bright lamps beneath the moon more bright,
Lamps that but flash and sparkle and light not
The inward eye and musing thought, nor reach
Where, poplar-like, that tall-built campanile
Lifts to the neighbouring moon her head and feels
The pale gold like an ocean laving her.

XIV

IN THE TRAIN

SHE was more wonderful than prizèd pearls!
She bore her beauty as an April flower
That hangs as sweet unknown as known. Her cheeks
The pallor of pale moony water had
Under the shadow of dark heavy hair.
Spearlike for straightness was her nose, with firm
Curve of soft nostrils: lips and chin firm too;
A broad white brow, and eyes set wide beneath—
Clear steady eyes—and lids whose quivering was
Than speech more cunning and than song more sweet
She lived in the moment; and the moment felt
Eternity's long kiss when her lips kissed
In speech. . . .
She went like sunset out, and I
Saw her no more. But O, she left in me
Memory of a moment made Eternity;
Unsealed a fountain of true joy, that sang
How beauty is the only breath of Heaven,
And lives in women as Spring lives in woods.

XV

SILENCE AND ECHO

Though birds be songless and the bare
  Branches of winter strain and creak,
There wants not music anywhere
    And you but speak.

But when birds sing and green leaves brush
  Green leaves awake, and dawn to dark
Sedge-warbler, linnet, swallow, thrush,
    Heav'n-loving lark,

Stir all the air to music ; yet
  That plenteous music peals unheard :
As well might leaves their noise forget,
    As well each bird,

If you but speak, if you but sing,
  Or echo of your singing creep
Into my mind, or whispering
    Call me from sleep.

And yet your eyes I never see,
  Memories of you like shadows pass :
O'er you the trees wave sighingly,
    And waves the grass.

XVI

HANDS

Your hands, your hands,
Fall upon mine as waves upon the sands.
O, soft as moonlight on that evening rose,
That but to moonlight doth its sweet unclose,
Your hands, your hands,
Fall upon mine, and my hands open as
That evening primrose opens when the hot hours pass.

Your hands, your hands,
They are like towers that in far southern lands
Look at pale dawn over gloom-valley'd miles,
White temple towers that gleam through mist at whiles.
Your hands, your hands,
Like the south wind fall kissing on my brow,
And all past joy and future is summed in this great
"Now!"

XVII

ABSENCE

DISTANCE no grace can lend you, but for me
Distance doth magnify your mystery.
With you, and soon content, I ask how should
In your two eyes be hid my heaven of good ?
How should your own mere voice the strange words speak
That tease me with the sense of what's to seek
In all the world beside ? How your brown hair,
That simply and neglectfully you wear,
Bind my wild thoughts in its abundant snare ?
With you, I wonder how you're stranger than
Another woman to another man ;
But parted—and you're as a ship unknown
That to poor castaways at dawn is shown
As strange as dawn, so strange they fear a trick
Of eyes long-vexed and hope with falseness sick.
Parted, and like the riddle of a dream,
Dark with rich promise, does your beauty seem.
I wonder at your patience, stirless peace,
Your subtle pride, mute pity's quick release.
Then are you strange to me and sweet as light
Or dew ; as strange and dark as starless night.
Then let this parting, Dear, be now forgiven :
I go from you to find in you strange heaven.

XVIII

THE HAUNTED SHADOW

Fair Trees, O keep from chattering so
When I with my more Fair do go
    Beneath your branches;
For if I laugh with her your sigh
Her rare and sudden mirth puts by,
Or your too noisy glee will take
Persuasion from my lips and make
    Her deaf as winter.

O be not as the pines—that keep
The shadow-charmèd light asleep—
    Perverse and sombre!
For when we in the pinewood walked
And of young love and far age talked,
Their solemn haunted shadow broke
Her peace—ah, how the sharp sob shook
    Her shadowed bosom!

XIX

ALONE AND COLD

Do not, O do not use me
  As you have usèd others.
Better you did refuse me :
  You have refusèd others.
Better, far better Hope to banish
A small child than, grown old,
Hope should decay, his vigour vanish,
  And I be left alone and
    Cold, cold.

Ah, use no guile nor cunning
  If you should ev'n yet love me.
Hark, Time with Love is running,
  Death cloud-like floats above me.
Love me with such simplicity
As children, frankly bold,
Do love with ; else 'twere best (ah me !)
  That I be left alone and
    Cold, cold.

XX

SLEEP

Not a dream brush your sleep,
Not a thought wake and creep
In upon your spirit's slumber;
Not a memory encumber,
Nor a thievish care unbar
Sleep's portcullis that no star
Nor sentry hath. I'll not speak
With my soul even: no, nor seek
Other happiness for you
When you this happy sleep sleep through.
Let no least desire waver
Between us, nor impatience quaver;
No sudden nearness of me flush
Your veins with welcome. . . . Hush, hush!
Be still, my thoughts, lest you creep
Unawares into her sleep.

XXI

THE FULL TIDE

Now speaks the wave, whispering me of you;
In all his murmur your music murmurs too.
O 'tis your voice, my love, whispering in
The wave's voice, ev'n your voice so far and thin;
And mine to yours answering clear is heard
In the high lonely voice of the last bird.

And when, my love, the full tide runneth again,
Shall yet the seabird call, call, call in vain?
Will not the tide wake in my heart and stir
The old rich happiness that's sunken there?
Thou moon of love, bid the retreated tide
Return, for which the wandering bird hath cried.

XXII

YOUR SHADOW

From Swindon out to White Horse Hill
I walked, in morning rain,
And saw your shadow lying there.
As clear and plain
As lies the White Horse on the Hill
I saw your shadow lying there.

Over the wide green downs and bleak,
Unthinking, free I walked,
And saw your shadow fluttering by.
Almost it talked,
Answering what I dared not speak
While thoughts of you ran fluttering by. . . .

So on to Baydon sauntered, teased
With that pure native air.
Sometimes the sweetness of wild thyme
The strings of care
Did pluck; sometimes my soul was eased
With more than sweetness of wild thyme.

Sometimes within a pool I caught
Your face, upturned to mine.
And where sits Chilton by the waters
Your look did shine
Wildly in the mill foam that sought
To hide you in those angry waters.

And yet, O Sweet, you never knew
  Those downs, the thymy air
That with your spirit haunted is—
  Yes, everywhere!
Ah, but my heart is full of you,
And with your shadow haunted is.

XXIII

MORNING PEACE

Nor jealousy a sharper torment has
Than this self-torturing and easeless mind :
As though one, seeing, smote his eyeballs blind
Then wandered wilful on a mountain pass.
Not love by beauty scorned more anguish knows,
Nor shadowed by love's loss more desolate grows.

For then, when love perverse doth love abuse,
When hope is stabbed with arrows of despair,
When fair things are grown hateful, being fair,
When memory old memory doth accuse ;
Then is the dark hour when the wanton mind
Would rage to think the world not all unkind.

What healing, then, for the distempered brain,
What poison's antidote, though wildly sought ?
Sick of self-love against myself I fought,
With wounded hands striving against my pain.
Dark, dark, dark shadows dragged before my sight ;
I hugged foul anger with a foul delight.

. . . No grief like that ! I waked at dawn, and there
A hundred spider-webs dew-bright were hung,
A myriad dew-drops on the morning flung ;
The marigold and sunflower were how fair
And rich in peace ! and that peace drank I up
As of the fresh dew drinks the buttercup.

XXIV

INEVITABLE CHANGE

YOUNG as the Spring seemed life when she
Came from her silent East to me ;
Unquiet as Autumn was my breast
When she declined into her West.

Such tender, such untroubling things
She taught me, daughter of all Springs ;
Such dusty deathly lore I learned
When her last embers redly burned.

How should it hap (Love, canst thou say ?)
Such end should be to so pure day ?
Such shining chastity give place
To this annulling grave's disgrace ?

Such hopes be quenched in this despair,
Grace chilled to granite everywhere ?
How should—in vain I cry—how should
That be, alas, which *only* could !

XXV

LONELINESS

How green and strange the light is,
  Creeping through the window.
    Lying alone in bed,
How strange the night is!

How still and chill the air is.
  It seems no sound could live
    Here in my room
That now so bare is.

Ah, bright and still the room is,
  But easeless here am I.
    Deep in my heart
Cold lonely gloom is!

XXVI

FIRST LOVE

I

"No, no! Leave me not in this dark hour,"
She cried. And I,
"Thou foolish dear, but call not dark this hour;
What night doth lour?"
And nought did she reply,
But in her eye
The clamorous trouble spake, and then was still.

O that I heard her once more speak,
Or even with troubled eye
Teach me her fear, that I might seek
Poppies for misery.
The hour was dark, although I knew it not,
But when the livid dawn brake then I knew,
How while I slept the dense night through
Treachery's worm her fainting fealty slew.

O that I heard her once more speak
As then—so weak—
"No, no! Leave me not in this dark hour."
That I might answer her,
"Love, be at rest, for nothing now shall stir
Thy heart, but my heart beating there."

XXVII

II

Come back, come back—ah, never more to leave me!
Come back, ev'n though your constant longing grieve me,
Longing for other kisses, hands, than mine.
By all that's most divine
In your frank human beauty, come and cover
With that deceiving smile the love your lover
Hath taught you, and the light that in your eyes
Tells of the painful joys that make your ruinous Paradise.

Come back, that so, upon the shining meadow
When the sun draws the magic of your shadow;
Or when the red fire's gradual sinking light
Yields up the room to night;
Seeing you thus or thus I may recapture
The very sharpness of remembered rapture:—
So it may seem, by exquisite deceit,
You are yet mine, I yours, and life yet rare and sweet.

Come back—nay, come not back now, come back never;
That day you went I knew it was for ever.
I know you, how the spectre of cold shame
Would chill you if you came.
Lo, here first love's first memory abideth;
Here in my heart the image of you yet hideth.
But though you should come back and hope thrilled me anew,
First love would yet be dead—oh, it would not be you!

XXVIII

III

O BUT what grace if I could but forget you!
You have made league with all familiar things—
The thrush that still, evening and morning, sings,
The aspen leaves that sigh
" My dear! " with your true voice when I pass by. . . .
O, and that painful 'lated flush of tender sky
That minds me, and with sense too grave for tears,
Of those forever dead too-blissful years.

Yet 'twere a miracle could I forget you,
Since ev'n dead things, once sensible of you,
Yield up your ghost; as all the garden through
Murmurs the rose, " 'Twas she
Shook in her palm the dew that shone in me ";
And on the stairs your recent footstep echoingly
Sounds yet again, and each dark doorway speaks
Of you toward whom my sharpened longing seeks.

O that I could forget or not regret you!
Could I but see you as one sees a fair
Child under apple-burdened boughs that bear
Morn's autumn beauty, and
Seeing her seeth Heaven at his hand,
And all day sees that happy child before him stand. . . .
Not thus I see you, but as one drowning sees
Home, friends—and loves his very enemies!

XXIX

"I HEARD A VOICE UPON THE WINDOW BEAT"

I HEARD a voice upon the window beat
And then grow dim, grow still.
Opening I saw the snowy sill
Marked with the robin's feet.
  Chill was the air and chill
The thoughts that in my bosom beat.

I thought of all that wide and hopeless snow
Crusting the frozen lands.
Of small birds that in famished bands
A-chill and silent grow.
  And how Earth's myriad hands
Clutched only hills of frosted snow.

And then I thought of Love that beat and cried
Famishing at my breast;
How I, by chilling care distrest,
Denied him, and Love died. . . .
  O, with what sore unrest
Love's ghost woke with the bird that cried!

XXX

THE CALL

Is it the wind that stirs the trees,
Is it the trees that scratch the wall,
  Is it the wall that shakes and mutters,
Is it a dumb ghost's call ?

The wind steals in and twirls the candle,
The branches heave and brush the wall,
  But more than tree or wild wind mutters
This night, this night of all.

" Open ! " a cry sounds, and I gasp.
" Open ! " and hands beat door and wall.
  " Open ! " and each dark echo mutters.
I rise, a shape and shadow tall.

" Open ! " Across the room I falter,
And near the door crouch by the wall ;
  Thrice bolt the door as the voice mutters
" Open ! " and frail strokes fall.

" Open ! " The light's out, and I shrink
Quaking and blind against the wall ;
  " Open ! " no sound is, yet it mutters
Within me now, this night of all.

Was it the wind that stirred the trees,
Was it the trees that scratched the wall,
  Was it the wall that shook and muttered,
Was it Love's Ghost's last call ?

XXXI

AGAINST DESIRE

UNSATISFIED and all unblissful heart,
What is it keeps thee from thy timely peace?
Lo here, a tree whispers to Care, "Depart!"
And hark, yon blackbird bidding Sorrow cease
Her tedious tale.
High overhead the sharp-edged white clouds sail
Bird-like upon the blue: what hindereth
The cloud that glooms thy courage (oft too frail)
From passing on this west wind's valorous breath?

It is Desire that maketh thee a slave,
The insatiable tyrant of man's life.
Up cloudy treacherous stairs Desire doth wave
His purple banner, and with pain and strife
And teasing fear
Thou climbest, and gay fancies flutter near. . . .
Sudden as Death thy fall is, yet again
His soft deceitful notes when thou dost hear
Once more dost climb and once more climb'st in vain.

Foolish, unblissful and unsatisfied!
I will lie down amid the seeding grass
And hear the wild bee humming at my side,
And watch the high clouds as they slowly pass.
Heart, be at rest,
Nor knock so wildly now within my breast!
Let that proud subtle tyrant called Desire
Be no more than a casual timid guest
Who creeps to warm him at a great Lord's fire.

XXXII

"O LOVE, WHAT SHALL BE SAID OF THEE?"

O LOVE, what shall be said of thee?
A light wandering on the sea;
A flare wild wreckers use to lure
Weary ships to depths unsure.
O Love, what shall be said of thee?
Henbane drunken in ecstasy;
Fire darted from darkling eyes;
To youth's unfortress'd heart surprise;
To slumber, dreams; to ache, relief;
Joyous lord of mutinous grief. . . .
Love, Love, what shall be said of thee,
Blind Pilot singing over the sea?

XXXIII

THE PHYSICIAN

She comes when I am grieving and doth say,
" Child, here is that shall drive your grief away."
When I am hopeless, kisses me and stirs
My breast with the strong lively courage of hers.
Proud—she doth humble me with but a word,
Or with mild mockery at my folly gird ;
Fickle—she holds me with her loyal eyes ;
Remorseful—tells of neighbouring Paradise ;
Envious—" Be not so mad, so mad," she saith,
" Envied and envier do race with Death ! "
She my good Angel is : and who is she ?—
The Soul's divine Physician, Memory.

XXXIV

WAITING

Rich in the waning light she sat
While the fierce rain on the window spat.
The yellow lamp-glow lit her face,
Shadows cloaked the narrow place
She sat adream in. Then she'd look
Idly upon an idle book;
Anon would rise and musing peer
Out at the misty street and drear;
Or with her loosened dark hair play,
Hiding her fingers' snow away;
And, singing softly, would sing on
When the desire of song had gone.
"O lingering day!" her bosom sighed,
"O laggard Time!" each motion cried.
Last she took the lamp and stood
  Rich in its flood,
And looked and looked again at what
  Her longing fingers' zeal had wrought;
And turning then did nothing say,
  Hiding her thoughts away.

XXXV

SLEEPING SEA

The Sea
Was even as a little child that sleeps
And keeps
All night its great unconsciousness of day.
No spray
Flashed when the wave rose, drooped, and slowly drew away.
No sound
From all that slumbering, full-bosomed water came;
The Sea
Lay mute in childlike sleep, the moon was as a candle-flame.
No sound
Save when a faint and mothlike air fluttered around.
No sound:
But as a Child that dreams and in his full sleep cries,
So turned the sleeping Sea and heaved her bosom of slow sighs.

XXXVI

WALKING AT EVE

WALKING at eve I met a little child
Running beside a tragic-featured dame,
Who checked his blitheness with a quick " For shame ! "
And seemed by sharp caprice froward and mild.
Scarce heeding her the sweet one ran, beguiled
By the lit street, and his eyes too aflame ;
Only, at whiles, into his eyes there came
Bewilderment and grief with terror wild. . . .

So, Beauty, dost thou run with tragic Life !
So, with the curious world's caress enchanted,
Ev'n of ill things thine esctasy doth make ;
Yet at the touch of fear and vital strife
The splendours thy young innocency forsake,
And with thy foster-mother's woe thou'rt haunted.

XXXVII

SAVING DELIGHT

POVERTY at each corner stands,
At ghostly hope with ghostly hands
Clutching, but never, never may
That pale evasive shadow stay. . . .
Yet cannot choose but blink and stare
Half with delight, half envy, where
Ride by, ride by the unenvious rich,
Who ev'n see not these shadows which
Hold out unpitied, piteous arms. . . .
Those rich, those rich whom no alarms
Of nipping want stir in the night,
And nothing frets but dreamed delight.
Envied, unenvious go they by
And sharp as thorns to misery.
  Yet think, how strange these spectres should
Pluck ev'n from envy buds of good!
For with delight they look and sigh
While those warm careless ones (who'll die
Ev'n like themselves) go by, go by.

II

But this have they, the unpitied poor,
Courage, pity, and that more,
O, more than common tenderness
Which in an alien guise doth dress
For foolish shame' sake. This have they
Who have nought else except the day

To ache in, and slow night to shiver,
With that temptation of the river.
How easy 'twere cold life to cast
With care and want aside at last,
Losing so little and to gain
At worst but other sense of pain!
What courage, theirs, to live when death
No more his common terrors hath! . . .
Yet—is it but stark courage saves
Them from that flood of cunning graves?
  Nay, ev'n in pain joy hideth as
The rainbow in a looking-glass.
Ev'n they, I vow, sup with delight
When moon-like beauteous, star-like bright,
Rich fair ones ride, ride by at night.

XXXVIII

"YOU THAT WERE"

You that were
Half my life ere life was mine;
You that on my shape the sign
Set of yours;
You that my young lips did kiss
When your kiss summed up my bliss. . . .
Ah, once more
You to kiss were all my bliss!

You whom I
Could forget—strange, could forget
Ev'n for days (ah now the fret
Of my grief!);
You who loved me though forgot;
Welcomed still, reproaching not. . . .
Ah, that now
That forgetting were forgot!

You that now
On my shoulder as I go
Put your hand that wounds me so;
You that brush
Yet my lips with that one last
Kiss that bitters all things past. . . .
How shall I
Yet endure that kiss the last?

You that are
Where the feet of my blind grief

Find you not, nor find relief;
You that are
Where my thought, flying after you,
Broken falls and flies anew. . . .
Now you're gone
My love accusing aches for you.

March 4, 1911.

XXXIX

"THE LIGHT THAT NEVER WAS ON SEA OR LAND"

O GONE are now those eager great glad days of days,
but I remember
Yet ev'n yet the light that turned the saddest of sad
hours to mirth;
I remember how elate I swung upon the thrusting
bowsprits,
And how the sun in setting burned and made the
earth all unlike earth.

O gone are now those mighty ships I haunted days
and days together,
And gone the mighty men that sang as crawled the
tall craft out to sea;
And fallen ev'n the forest tips and changed the eyes
that watched their burning,
But still I hear that shout and clang, and still the
old spell stirs in me.

And as to some poor ship close locked in water dense
and dark and vile
The wind comes garrulous from afar and sets the
idle masts a-quiver;
And ev'n to her so foully docked, swift as the sun's
first beam at dawn
The sea-bird comes and like a star wheels by and
down along the river;—

So to me the great wind blows from far strange waters
echoingly,
And faint forgotten longings break the fast-sealed
pools within my breast;
So to me when sunset glows the scream comes of the
white sea-bird,
And all those ancient raptures wake and wakes.
again the old unrest.

I see again the masts that crowd and thicken like a
lane of pines,
I hear again the shouts and cries and lip-lap of the
waveless pool;
I see again the smalling cloud of sail that into distance
fades,
I am again the boy whose eyes with tears of grief
and hope are full.

XL

HOME AGAIN

I saw three ships that sailèd by
Slow as thick smoke over the sky.
One was black-sailed, one brown, and one
Had sails with crimson fire that shone.

Laden from the Port of Gold
These ships they sailèd proud and bold;
First the black and next the brown,
And then the red sail at sundown.

The first bore slaves and ivory,
And golden ingots rare to see.
The second, wondrous flashing things
Plucked from the crowns of 'minished Kings.

The third no ransack riches bore,
But soldiers scarred and weary sore:
Warriors who but old wounds could show
For jewels with cold fire aglow.

I saw those ships creep up the river
With sumless treasure burdened ever;
And one chill dark December day
All in the dock's cold languor lay.

How merrily shouted the crews when
Shrilled the gay pipes their "Home again!"
Seamen ashore, seamen aboard
Clamour and answering clamour roared.

Ashore the men o' the treasure ships
Leapt with glad oaths upon their lips. . . .
How welcome, they, with pockets stuffed
Full o' gold, and breasts with bragging puffed !

The famous Captains richly dight,
Eyes lit with late-deferred delight,
Desire and pride ; the jolly men
Too loud with joy for thinking then :—

I saw them, and pale townsmen who
Command these great Commanders too ;
And eager mothers, sweethearts, wives,
Whose life is all in others' lives :

I saw them all—and saw the men
Of the red sail who watched them when
Ashore they went hallooing so
To Jack, Bill, Meg and Mother Rowe.

I saw those old home-comers stare
If aught of welcome lingered there
For them, who fourteen years agone
England's armour had put on.

And now, useless and lame returned,
What vain hope in each bosom burned ?
Have ye, oh goldless ones, forgot
To be far off is to be not ?

I saw, and counted fifty and five
Old bodies, wasted yet alive.
Upon firm earth they stood, and parted
This way and that, yet cheerful-hearted.

Said one : " 'Tis lonely like, but home."
And one : " The wenches they don't come
To hulks like we." " Old England's still "
Said one, " Old England—so long, Will ! "

XLI

SAILING OF THE *GLORY*

MERRILY shouted all the sailors
  As they left the town behind ;
Merrily shouted they and gladdened
  At the slip-slap of the wind.
But envious were those faint home-keepers,
  Faint land-lovers, as they saw
How the *Glory* dipped and staggered—
    Envying saw
Pass the ship while all her sailors
    Merrily shouted.

Far and far on eastern waters
  Sailed the ship and yet sailed on,
While the townsmen, faint land-lovers,
  Thought, " How long is't now she's gone ?
Now, maybe, Bombay she touches,
  Now strange craft about her throng " ;
Till she grew but half-remembered,
    Gone so long :
Quite forgot how all her sailors
    Merrily shouted.

Far in unfamiliar waters
  Ship and shipmen harbourage found,
Where the rocks creep out like robbers
  After travellers tempest-bound.

Then those faint land-lovers murmured
Doleful thanks not dead were they :—
Ah, yet envious, though the *Glory*
Sunken lay,
Hearing again those farewell voices
Merrily shouting.

XLII

ENGLAND'S ENEMY

SHE stands like one with mazy cares distraught,
Around her sudden angry storm-clouds rise,
Dark, dark! and comes the look into her eyes
Of eld. All that herself herself hath taught
She cons anew, that courage new be caught
Of courage old. Yet comfortless still lies
Snake-like in her warm bosom (vexed with sighs)
Fear of the greatness that herself hath wrought.

No glory but her memory teems with it,
No beauty that's not hers; more nobly none
Of all her sisters runs with her; but she
For her old destiny dreams herself unfit,
And fumbling at the future doubtfully
Muses how Rome of Romans was undone.

XLIII

THE UNUTTERED

For so long and so long had I forgot,
Serenely busied
With thousand things ; at whiles desire grew hot
And my soul dizzied
With hapless and insatiable salt thirst.
Nor was I humbled
Saving with shame that, running with the worst,
My feet yet stumbled.
Pride and delight of life enchained my heart,
My heart enchanted,
And oh, soft subtle fingers had their part,
And eyes love-haunted.
But while my busy mind was thus intent,
Or thus surrendered,
What was it, oh what strange thing was it sent
Through all that hindered
A thrill that woke the buried soul in me ?—
It seemed there fluttered
A thought—or was't a sudden fear ?—of Thee,
Remote, unuttered.

XLIV

FAIR EVE

Fair Eve, as fair and still
As fairest thought, climbeth the sheltering hill;
As fair and wise
As heaven apeep in a babe's distant eyes.

As cool, as fair and cool,
As starlight swimming in a lonely pool;
Subtle and mild
As through her eyes the soul looks of a child.

A linnet sings and sings,
A shrill swift cleaves the air with blackest wings;
White twinkletails
Run frankly in their meadow as day fails.

On such a night, a night
That seemeth but the sleep of tired light,
I look and wait
For what I know not, looking long and late.

Is't for a dream I look,
A vision from the Tree of Heaven shook,
As sweetness shaken
From yon fresh limes on lonely ways forsaken?

A dream of one, maybe,
Who comes like sudden wind from oversea ?
Or lovèd swallow
Whom all fair days and golden musics follow ?—

More sudden yet, more strange
Than magic airs on magic hills that range :—
Of one who'll steep
The soul in soft forgetfulness ere it sleep.

Yea, down the hillside road,
Where Eve's unhasty feet so gently strode,
Come the lov'd feet
Of Him Who is the world's sole fair and sweet.

XLV

EASTER

With Earth's arising riseth He from death,
To all His faithful saith
With urgent breath :

" Wake ye, out of your Winter-weary sleep ! "
And the slow pulses leap.
No more then creep

The heavy days to night, and nights to day.
The cloud-pack hastens away
If He but say

Far off and faint and tremulous, " Awake ! "
How the heart's enemies quake
When His steps shake

The silence they have woven as a shroud
Upon it ! Great and proud
Alike they are bowed.

And as when lovely, radiant queenlike Spring
Queenlike with her doth bring
Every dear thing

Earth faints for ; and the woods and gleaming meads
Fulfilled are of their needs ;
And the lost seeds

Are found in keen green blades, and song again
In birds, and the sweet rain
Doth teach the plain

That gladness of the heaven-neighbouring hills;
And the whole amazed Earth thrills
With bliss that fills

Every hid channel and cell:—So when He rises
In thousand sweet disguises,
What swift surprises,

Heats, pregnant showers, flowers and rich airs He gives,
Till the soul truly lives;
And the fugitives—

Fear, Hate, Despair—ev'n as they fly are slain!
O, precious ev'n the pain
When in each vein

The leaping blood doth the old languors quicken;
Precious, for hopes that sicken,
To feel joys thicken

Like sudden leaves wherethrough the cool winds stir;
Precious past gold and myrrh
To feel Him near.

. . . . .

But as to some east hillside's dewless breast,
Naked of leaf and nest,
Spring, the loved guest,

Comes not, though all the woods her blisses cover,
And larks but yonder hover
The soft turf over;

Barren of Thy spring, Lord, unvisited
Of any rains; but dead,
Unmemoried,

My heart lies; yea, Thy spring neglects it yet. . . .
O, canst Thou still forget,
My need forget?

XLVI

THE SNARE

Loose me and let me go!
I am not yours.
I do not know
Your dark name, ev'n, O Powers
That out of the deep rise
And wave your arms
To weave strange charms.

Though the snare of eyes
You weave for me,
As a pool lies
In wait for the moon when she
Out of the deep doth rise;
And though you set
Like mist your net;

And though my feet you catch,
O dark, strange Powers,
You may not snatch
My Soul, or call it yours.
Out of your snare I rise
And pass your charms,
Nor feel your harms.

You loose me and I go:
O see the Arms

Spread for me! lo,
His Tears quench your charms.
He from the deep doth rise
And round me set
His Love for net.

XLVII

"O HIDE ME IN THY LOVE"

O HIDE me in Thy love, secure
From this earth-clinging meanness.
Lave my uncleanness
In Thy compassionating love!

Bury this treachery as deep
As mercy is enrooted.
My days ill-fruited
Shake till the shrivelled burden fall.

Put by those righteous arrows, Lord,
Put ev'n Thy justice by Thee;
So I come nigh Thee
As came the Magdalen to Thy feet.

And like a heavy stone that's cast
In a pool, on Thee I throw me,
And feel o'erflow me
Ripples of pity, deep waves of love.

XLVIII

BIRDS OF LONGING

Why come ye back unladen, ye wild birds
Tamed to the lowly freightage of my thought ?
Into the morn ye went with urgent wing,
And every feather of each small breast was fraught
With my desire, wild birds !
And now ye move slowly as drowsy herds,
And lo, ye bring me nought.

Go ye again from this lost tower, wild birds,
And when the angels of the dawn unpen
Day's flock of white swift wings, fly ye with them
Over this wilderness where weary men
Stir in unquiet sleep,
And the snake, Evil, her long watch doth keep :—
Fly ye afar, and when

Ye reach those difficult skies, O wild, wild birds,
And in deep bowers of light day's birds are hidden,
And wearier beat your wings beneath the weight
Of all my longing, even as tempest-chidden
Faint sea-birds drop to sea ;
Then shall God's pity lift you tenderly
To Heavens no more forbidden.

XLIX

VISION AND ECHO

I HAVE seen that which sweeter is
  Than happy dreams come true.
I have heard that which echo is
  Of speech past all I ever knew.
Vision and echo, come again,
Nor let me grieve in easeless pain!

It was a hill I saw, that rose
  Like smoke over the street,
Whose greening rampires were upreared
  Suddenly almost at my feet;
And tall trees nodded tremblingly
And brushed the very soul of me.

But ah, the song, the song I heard
  And grieve to hear no more!
It was not angel-voice, nor child's
  Singing alone and happy, nor
Note of the wise prophetic thrush,
Whose song might bid an angel's hush.

It was not these, and yet I knew
  That song; but now, alas
My unpurged ears prove all too gross
  To keep the nameless air that was
And is not; and my eyes forget
The vision, with unshed tears still wet.

Yet though forgetful I did see,
  And heard, but cannot tell,
And on my forehead felt an air
  Unearthly, on my heart a spell.
I have seen that which deathless is,
And heard—what I for ever miss!

L

PRAYER TO MY LORD

If ever Thou didst love me, love me now,
When round me beat the flattering vans of life,
Kissing with rapid breath my lifted brow.
Love me, if ever, when the murmur of strife
In each dark byway of my being creeps,
When pity and pride, passion and passion's loss
Wash wavelike round the world's eternal Cross,
Till 'mid my fears a new-born love indignant leaps.

If ever Thou canst love me, love me yet,
When sweet, impetuous loves within me stir
And the frail portals of my spirit fret—
The love of love, that makes Heaven heavenlier,
The love of earth, of birds, children and light,
Love of this bitter, lovely native land. . . .
O, love me when sick with all these I stand
And Death's far-rumoured wings beat on the lonely night.

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